

Background

Increasingly, people of all ages are using wireless phones and devices for communicating, for information gathering, and for entertainment – in all types of locations. And, as new wireless technologies are introduced, so too are new and expanded ways to get information and be entertained via your wireless phone or device.

But with the benefits of wireless technology comes a potential harm: the growing use of wireless phones and devices by children affords them the opportunity to access adult material that may be inappropriate for them.

Controlling Access to Adult Material

Adult material is available through numerous sources, including magazines, television, movies, songs, telephones, gaming systems, and the Internet.

Parents and caretakers concerned about children accessing inappropriate material via wireless phones and devices may want to know more about the type of material available and how to limit access to that content.

Wireless carriers may use voluntary guidelines to classify content that they provide over wireless handsets. (See “Wireless Industry Guidelines” on pg. 3).

What to Know

Be aware of the types of material that children can access via their wireless phones. The following types of material can be downloaded on many wireless phones and devices, and may include content inappropriate for children:

- Images, such as background “wallpaper” for the phone screen;
- Games, including some games that are also available for gaming systems, such as Playstation® or Xbox®;
- Music and songs, including ring tones, ringback tones, and downloads of full songs; and
- Video, including certain television shows, movies, and music videos, as well as video programming specially made for, and only available on, wireless phones.

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In addition, wireless phones and devices can be used to access:

- **Web sites.** Because of the small screens and limited keypads on wireless handsets, it's often difficult or impossible for you to browse the entire Web. Instead, many wireless carriers offer access to a pre-set list of commonly-used Web sites, such as Yahoo!® and ESPN®, that have been designed for viewing on a wireless handset. You should be aware, however, that most smartphones and personal digital assistants (PDAs), including the Sidekick®, Blackberry®, iPAQ®, and Treo® models, have larger screens and full keypads that do allow users to surf the entire Web.
- **Text, photo, and video messages.** Many wireless phones and devices can also be used to exchange messages, including text and instant messages, as well as photos and videos. Your children can send messages to other wireless phone users or to e-mail addresses, and receive them on their wireless devices. In addition, text messaging technology can be used to request and receive specific material from various sources, such as Web sites. For instance, mobile users can send a message to a 5-digit "short code" requesting certain information, such as a sports score, a weather forecast, or entertainment content, and the information will then be sent directly to the wireless phone/device.

The types of applications and wireless content available to you and your children varies among wireless carriers. Different carriers offer different packages available for download.

Opportunities for purchasing applications and content also vary by carrier. For instance, some carriers sell content on a per-application basis (e.g., \$4.99 to download a particular game, or \$0.99 to download a particular wallpaper image), and these applications can often be purchased and downloaded directly from wireless handsets.

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On the other hand, some applications may be available on an unlimited use basis for a flat monthly fee, and you must subscribe to those packages through your carrier prior to downloading the material.

Finally, the type of wireless content available to you depends on the handset that you own. Newer, more advanced handsets are often capable of accessing a wider range of material, such as video programming and high-resolution games.

What You Can Do

If you are concerned about your children accessing adult material from their wireless phones/devices, consider the following:

- **Monitor how your children are using their wireless phones or other wireless devices.** For example, are they using them mainly for talking, or are they using them for messaging, taking photos and downloading applications?
- **Check with your carrier to see what types of material it offers and what types can be accessed from your children's handsets.**
- **Check with your carrier to see if there are ways to prevent access to and downloading of content that may contain inappropriate material and that is available on a per-use or per-application basis (e.g., games, wall paper images, songs).**
- **Monitor your bill.** Any content purchases made from a wireless phone should appear on your monthly bill, so check your bill to see if any purchases have been made from your children's phones/devices. The FCC requires that the descriptions of charges on wireless carrier bills be full, clear, non-deceptive, and in plain language.

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What You Can Do (cont'd.)

- Check with your carrier to see what handsets are available for your children that are not capable of accessing advanced applications that may contain adult material.
- Check with your carrier to see whether subscriptions to wireless data or wireless Internet packages also offer access to adult material on your children's phone.
- Visit <http://www.wiredsafety.org/>, the Web site of an organization described as an online safety, education, and help group, including helping parents keep online pornography away from their kids.

Wireless Industry Guidelines

CTIA—The Wireless Association® has voluntary guidelines for wireless carriers to use in classifying content that they provide directly over wireless handsets. These voluntary guidelines apply only to content that you purchase from your wireless carrier, either on a one-time use or download basis, or as part of a package with a monthly fee such as ring tones, wallpaper, games, music, video clips, or TV shows. Content that is generated or owned by a wireless user, such as text messages, instant messages, email (through chat rooms, message boards, etc.) and picture mail is not included in the wireless carrier's content classification system. Also, content that is accessed by surfing the Internet on a wireless handset is not currently included in the classification system. The guidelines urge carriers to provide separate Web filtering software for Web browsing services.

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Wireless Industry Guidelines (cont'd.)

Wireless carriers choosing to follow these voluntary guidelines agree to use at least two content ratings:

(1) Generally Accessible or available to consumers of all ages; and

(2) Restricted or accessible only to those age 18 and older or to those younger than 18 years old, when specifically authorized by a parent or guardian. The **Restricted** ratings system generally is based on or uses criteria under existing ratings systems for movies, television, music, and games.

The FCC encourages industry efforts to address consumer concerns about access to content inappropriate for children, but neither endorses nor took part in developing these particular guidelines. These guidelines are voluntary, do not have the force of FCC rules, and the FCC cannot respond to complaints or take enforcement action for any violations of the guidelines. You can find out more about the guidelines and the participating wireless carriers by visiting www.ctia.org, calling CTIA at (202) 785-0081, or writing to CTIA, 1400 16th Street, NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20036.

For More Information

For general information on this and other telecommunications-related issues, you may contact the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau in the following ways:

Internet at www.fcc.gov/cgb

Consumer Center:
1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice
1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY

Mail:
Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554.



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To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/contacts/>.

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